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AGRICULTURAL CHAOS, CHURCH SUPPRESSION IN BALTIC COUNTRIES

V. Marton

According to newly arrived refugees from Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, these countries, despite their rich farm lands, are no longer self-supporting so far as their food requirements are concerned. Before the Communists subjugated them, the three Baltic states always had a substantial export to Western Europe.

Collectivization has created complete chaos in the Baltics, and as a consequence, farming is in a state of disorganization. Small farm owners have been branded as kulaks and driven away from their properties, or deported. Kolkhoz chairmen, bookkeepers, planners, brigade leaders, guards of the "socialist property" -- thousands of them -- have taken the place of dispossessed farmers. These big and small "bosses" want to live well and issue orders only. However, they are not competent in farm management, and for their blunders the poor agricultural workers have to suffer. The latter earn hardly more than 2 or 3 rubles per day, while an ordinary suit costs 1,600-1,800 rubles. In addition, demands for higher deliveries are increasing, and nonfulfillment is punished as sabotage.

Under these circumstances it is understandable that agricultural workers, despite a ban on leaving the farms, flock to the towns, attracted by the relatively higher standard of the industrial workers. The industries work to full capacity. The workers do not enjoy prosperity, however, because prices have not decreased, since the industries produce for the armament program and for export to the "sister republics."

On the average, an industrial worker earns 400-600 rubles per month, but receives only 70 percent of his wages. The rest goes to taxes, "voluntary" state loans, donations to national defense, etc. Consequently, he must pinch pennies and face semistarvation for at least 5 months if he wishes to purchase a suit.

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In the wake of Communist exploitation, weariness and dispiritedness are manifested in the cities as well as in the country. During the first years of the Communist occupation, at least a faint hope of speedy liberation prevailed. However, the regime now has its tentacles everywhere, and is unbelievably ingenious at finding new means of diverting the attention of the people. For example, Jew-baiting was employed considerably earlier than it was known abroad. Immediately after World War II, there were certain hints about "Jewish Trotskyites" and "agents of Jewish plutocrats" who appear "in a cosmopolitan mask" to damage the Soviet state. Later, words were openly turned into action. Directors and party functionaries of Jewish origin were dismissed. Party cells of industrial enterprises and kolkhozes were directed to make clear to the workers that Soviet Jews maintained secret connections with Israel and that a Jewish-American plot was in the making against the workers of the whole world.

Next to the Jews, the Catholic Church is called the No 2 enemy of the people. Officially the churches are allowed to hold religious services, but in reality their number has steadily decreased since the war, because the buildings have not been maintained and many of them have been closed "for reasons of safety." Religious instruction in schools is also allowed, provided that a sufficient number of students express a desire to attend classes in religion. However, this privilege has existed on paper only since the unpleasant experience in Lithuania, when parents adhering to the Catholic religion were exposed "for having been in criminal collusion with the clergy."

The "Friends of Children Society," which was originated after the war to take care of orphans, is very active. From the very beginning, the society assumed guardianship over certain schools. These schools, which received first-class equipment, became much sought after. However, the society ruled that no religious instruction would be given and that pupils must be educated in accordance with Marxist principles. Thus, these educational institutions became unrestrained propaganda media for godlessness.

The power of the Catholic Church is broken in Lithuania, and the majority of the priests, more than 1,000, have vanished without any trace. Two big dioceses, Panevezhis and Vil'nyus, are now administered by a vicar, Kasimir Paltarokas. The Kaunas archdiocese is administered by a canon, Josas Stankevichus, who also has the Kayshyadoris and Vilkavishkis dioceses under his jurisdiction.

There are no high church dignitaries left in the country. The press and the radio repeat daily that these were the agents of the Pope and warn the people to exercise special vigilance against the "conspirators of Rome."

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